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## Students' Strategies in Reducing Anxiety in Learning English

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### Abstract

*The aims of this research is to know the level of anxiety faced by students at ABA-UMI, to know the factors cause anxiety, and to know the students' strategies in reducing anxiety in learning English. This research used descriptive qualitative method. The writers focused on observing the level of anxiety faced by ABA students. The writers took two classes as the respondents in 2013-2014 academic years. The writers did classroom observation and interviewed nine (9) students who tended to feel anxious in learning English. The observation was conducted three meetings in speaking class and the writers used video recording to record and collect the data needed. The writers found three levels of anxiety faced by ABA students; they were mild anxiety, moderate anxiety and severe anxiety level. The first level can be seen in physical response from the students such as nervous, afraid, sweating, and embarrassed. But, the students could control their anxiety by motivating themselves to learn. The second level of anxiety was moderate level. The student did not participate in class (silent), cold hands and sweating. In this level, the students could control his/her anxiety so that he/she could participate in learning. And the last level of anxiety found was severe anxiety. The writers found that there were two students who felt anxious. The students had different symptoms such as cold hands, sweating, and their head feel heavy. This anxiety appeared when students could not overcome his/her worry. In this level, the students could not control their anxiety so that they could not participate even avoid the learning activity.*

**Keywords:** Students, Strategies, Anxiety, Learning English

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### 1. Introduction

English as a foreign language is not a new thing for students because it has become one of the main subjects in facing the global era. But in the learning process, there are some obstacles that hinder language skills. One of them is anxiety. Feelings of anxiety arise when students feel there is danger; feel threatened or incapable of doing what is ordered even when they are asked to speak in class.

Anxiety is a feeling disorder that arises because of an excessive worry in a person. It can be experienced by any individual who feels threatened or fear of danger that will happen. According to Vye, Scholjegerdes & Welch, 2007:18, anxiety is a part of our lives. In general, students experience anxiety when faced something difficult, for example facing a difficult lesson, or completing the assignment. This condition is experienced by almost all

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students only the level of anxiety is different. Anxiety can also give positive impact that is helping to improve students' motivation in learning (Sasha et al, 2011). But the problem is when anxiety gives negative impact to students such as excessive anxiety that causes decreased concentration, and students' memory. The same assumption stated in Wikipedia (2018) anxiety is an emotion characterized by an unpleasant state of inner turmoil, often accompanied by nervous behaviour such as pacing back and forth, somatic complaints, and rumination. Therefore, in learning process, writers saw some students were embarrassed even afraid to participate in class.

## **2. Theoretical Review**

Cheng (2009:13) stated that anxiety is an uncomfortable feeling but a normal thing experienced by every individual in his/her life. It is relevant with Stein & Walker, 2002: 6, they stated that anxiety is a normal response to stressful or threats situations. Besides, Huberty (2008) said that anxiety is a human emotion in the school environment, but good communication and support can minimize the negative impact of anxiety.

MacIntyre & Gardner (1999:284) stated that language anxiety as tension and fear specifically related to the context of the second language including speaking, listening and learning. Therefore, foreign language anxiety is defined as feelings of anxiety, worry, nervous and fear experienced by non native speakers. It causes the mastery of English becomes obstructed.

While Krashen (2003) said that learning English as a foreign language learning involving physic factors such as shyness, fear of being wrong, lack of confidence, anxiety and other affective factors affect the ability of one's language. While Gardner in Hui-Ju-Liu, et al (2015) defines foreign language anxiety as a tense and anxious feeling that is specifically associated with foreign language difficulties, including speaking, listening and learning.

It is relevant with Horwitz & Cope (2010) stated that foreign language anxiety is associated with feelings of discomfort when their language are limited.

### **Level of Anxiety**

According to Peplau in Annette F. Brown (2017), there are four (4) levels of anxiety, they are mild anxiety, moderate anxiety, severe anxiety and panic. Every level has different characteristics, it depends on the ability of existing individuals from inside and outside as well as its environment. They are:

#### **1. Mild anxiety**

This anxiety is related to daily life. This level of anxiety causes a person to be alert, motivate learning and produce creativity. Signs and symptoms are increased perception and attention, alert, and the students who feel this level of anxiety can solve the problem effectively then learning ability will occur. Manifestations that arise at this stage are fatigue, irritability, increased perception, high awareness, able to learn, improve motivation and attitude based on the situation.

#### **2. Moderate anxiety**

Anxiety at this level allows people to focus on what matters so that the individual has a selective but capable attention. Manifestations that arise at this stage are increased fatigue, heart beat faster with high volume, students have a narrow perception, and they cannot learn optimally, decreased concentration, irritability, and impatient.

### 3. Severe anxiety

Severe anxiety greatly affects one's perception. Someone with a high level of anxiety tends to focus on something more detailed and specific. Manifestations that arise at this level are complaints about vertigo, cannot learn effectively, headaches, insomnia, frequent urination and confusion.

### 4. Panic

This level is related to fear and terror because of having lost control. People who experience panic are not capable doing something directed. The symptoms that appear at this level are difficult to breathe, pupil dilation, pale, screaming, crying and hallucinations

### **Anxiety Causing Factors**

Based on the research conducted by Cheng (2005) , the factors that affect anxiety in foreign languages are:

1. Sociodemographic factors. Sociodemographic factors that affect foreign language anxiety such as age, gender, academic achievement, experience abroad and multilingualism.
2. Situational factors. Situational factors are matters relating to class situation and social situation. A formal and rigid classroom environment tends to make students feel tense.
3. Teacher characteristic factors. This relates to the characteristics of the teacher that can increase or decrease anxiety in students.
4. Psychological factors

- Self perception

Horwitz and Cope (2010) stated that foreign language anxiety related to the discomfort some people feel when their foreign language abilities are limited.

- Self esteem

Self esteem is the individual's judgment of self achievement. Describing the extent to which the individual judges himself as a person who has ability and competent.

- Self confidence

Self confidence is a person's mental or psychological condition that gives a strong confidence to do something.

Vasey et.al 1994 in Huberty (2008) revealed that the main characteristic of anxiety is worry, it occurs excessively and students can experience a social, personal function and lead to declining academic performance.

It is relevant with Bourne ( 2005) who states that anxiety can have impact on all aspects including physiological, behavioral and person's psychological reactions.

### **3. Method**

This study is aimed to examine the level of anxiety faced by students, the factors that cause anxiety in learning English and students' strategies in reducing anxiety in learning

English. This study employed descriptive qualitative method to expand people's understanding of particular things in the world (Hancock et.al, 2009). The subject of this research is ABA-UMI students 2016-2017 academic years that consisted of four (4) classes. In this case, the writers used purposive sampling, where this technique is one of the techniques used to determine the subjects by considering something (Sugiyono, 2009).

The writers observed two classes at ABA-UMI Makassar where the subjects of this research were students who tend to experience anxiety in the classroom when learning English.

The instrument of this research consisted of the writers as the major instrument to get the data. The observation was completed with observation checklist and the last instrument was interview to complete the data needed. The writers did observation by recording the whole activities in the class and used observation checklist to identify the level of anxiety that appeared in the classroom. Therefore, the writers interviewed students to get the data related to the level of anxiety, the factors and the students' strategies to reduce anxiety in learning English.

In this research, there were some steps to be done in collecting data, they are:

1. The writers attended in the class and did observation
2. The writers used structured interview to get the data about level of anxiety, the factors cause anxiety and also students' strategies in reducing anxiety in learning English.

In this research, the writers used descriptive analysis technique to identify and classify the level of anxiety, the factors cause anxiety and also students' strategies in reducing anxiety in learning English. After that, the writers listened to the recording entirely and read the result of interview from students. Then, the writers presented and interpreted descriptively.

#### **4. Result And Discussion**

Based on the result of this research from two classes taken as sample, the writers found nine (9) students who tended to experience anxiety in learning English. There were six (6) students who was mild anxiety level in learning English, one (1) student was in moderate anxiety level and two (2) students who were in severe anxiety level. The first discovery showed that there were six (6) students who were in the first level of anxiety when they were asked to give comment or answer the question. The students showed the symptoms such as nervous, afraid, sweating, and embarrassed. It is a normal thing experienced by every individual when confronted with something threatening. Stein & Walker (2002:6) stated that anxiety is a normal response to the threatening situation.

The students had different reason about the cause of anxiety in learning English. Their anxiety could be influenced by four factors. 1) sociodemographic, where the students lack of knowledge of English, they should adapt with new environment and friends, and face a new lesson, 2) situasional, the classroom situation that required students to speak English, and the tension that appeared in class 3) fierce teacher characteristics, teacher who always asked question to the students and then the teacher who made students

curious about different teaching method used in class. 4) psychology, where the students lacked of self perception and self confidence

The second discovery was moderate anxiety level. In this level, there was one student who felt anxious. The student did not participate in class (silent), cold hands and sweating. Horwitz & Cope ( 2010 ) said that foreign language anxiety related to feeling of discomfort when their ability was limited. But, the student can control his/her anxiety by focusing her attention so he/she could participate in class. It is relevant with Peplau (1963), he stated that people who experience moderate anxiety could focus on important matters.

The third discovery was severe anxiety level. In this level, the writers found that there were two students who felt anxious. The students had different symptoms such as cold hands, sweating, and their head feel heavy. This anxiety appeared when students could not overcome his/her worry. Besides, the students were also faced with something new such as new friends and environment. This anxiety gives bad effect to the students or the negative cycle of anxiety (Carlo , 2015).

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussions in the preceding chapter, the writers come up with the following conclusion. The first semester students at ABA-UMI academic year 2016-2017 experienced anxiety in different level.

Based on the factors cause anxiety to students in learning English, the writers found that all students felt anxious which was influenced by four (4) factors namely sociodemographic factors, situational factors, teacher characteristic factors and psychological factors. But, the students who felt anxious in mild and moderate anxiety can reduce their anxiety by directing the anxiety to the positive one, they motivate themselves. In addition, students also try to stay focused and concentrate on learning English.

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